

6.8.2025 Day of Pentecost

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17

“The Spirit abides in you”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Advocate, and the Spirit of truth who continues to gather and empower the church. On the first Pentecost, the church became conscious of the power of the Holy Spirit, conscious of itself as a gathering of all nations and people, and conscious that God is speaking in and through it.

This morning in hearing Acts 2 read in several languages – German, Japanese, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, and English – we also become conscious of the Holy Spirit in and among us, speaking through different languages, nationalities, cultures, and identities. The Holy Spirit makes us conscious of the unity we share within our diversity.

*“On the day of Pentecost, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and divided tongues as of fire, rested over each person”* – and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Spirit, people from every nation began to understand one another. In gathering them, the Holy Spirit was overcoming the boundaries of difference that had separated them.

They asked one another, *“What does this mean?”* We might also ask the same question! Have you ever wondered why the church welcomes all people? Pentecost means the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out for all people. Have you ever wondered why the Bible is translated into every language? Pentecost means that God chooses to speak through all languages and people. Have you ever wondered why God works through all gifts and abilities? Pentecost means the fire of the Spirit empowers all people in body and spirit. Have you ever wondered why the church is always oriented to the future rather than to the past? Pentecost means the Spirit is always renewing the church to speak God’s word today and tomorrow.

*What does this mean?* To speak requires breath, and each of us have been given the breath of life, the *ruach* of God, God’s breath, wind, and Spirit. Pentecost means God’s breath, the Spirit, is abiding in you no matter who you are. St. Mark’s font in the shape of a dove, the Holy Spirit, is always hovering above us in the sanctuary – a reminder of the Spirit given in baptism and abiding in you, speaking through your voice. In a world that more and more seeks to silence the voices of many, Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit is always speaking and can never be silenced.

The first Pentecost included all nations gathered in Jerusalem: *“Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.”* The Holy Spirit continues to come to a diverse humanity, giving all people the

power to speak about God and to understand one another. Pentecost means that people of many nations, ethnicities, and identities are brought into unity through the Spirit to speak about God's deeds of power. *"What does this mean?"* The Holy Spirit continues to speak among us. God is still speaking. Are we listening?

The word for "power" in Greek is *dunamis* (δύναμις), the root of our English word "dynamite." The message of Pentecost is dynamite because it explodes the world's idea that one voice, nation, or ethnicity is better than another. God loves all nations and people. God is still speaking. Are we listening?

Over and over in my work as a missionary in Japan, I saw and heard the Spirit at work. Every year in June, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church, had roundtable meetings with foreign churches working together in mission. At these meetings, representatives of churches from Finland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, the United States, and Japan met in Tokyo to share ideas and plan for mission in Japan, international theological exchange, joint work in other nations. Communication was aided by simultaneous translation, and I was often a translator at these meetings, yet it was the overcoming power of Holy Spirit that brought differing ideas into unity. The Holy Spirit overcomes different languages, cultures, agendas, ideologies, and biases, always gathering us into one body in common mission for Christ. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing in this congregation, overcoming our differences to create unity in mission for Christ.

Pentecost is dynamite because it explodes the idea that some people or nations are better than others. The ongoing miracle of Pentecost is that on this Sunday, these sacred texts are being read in every language around the world. Amid a diversity of cultures, theologies, and liturgical traditions, the Spirit continues to gather the church to confess one Lord, one baptism, and one divine love for all humanity.

No government on earth can match the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, who continues to gather people and nations into unity with Christ. Like that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gathers us into unity out of our difference – a unity that does not destroy our diversity. To be in unity with the Spirit never robs us of our human diversity, rather, God is at work in the diversity of our ethnicities, cultures, languages, and identities. The Holy Spirit reshapes human community as a church of all nations.

The triune God is perhaps the best example of unity in diversity: three diverse persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in divine unity. One in three and three in one. God is big enough to hold human diversity within a divine unity. The church is the new human family. As Paul writes in Romans, *"All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."* In a broken and divided world, the Spirit gathers a diverse humanity into

unity, making a new human family of sisters and brothers in Christ.

On the first Pentecost, there were also naysayers who sneered, saying, “*They are filled with new wine.*” The world continues to go its own way, belittling attempts at peace and inclusion, seeking to find profit in the confusion of war, while excluding the poor and the weak. Yet the Spirit continues to speak the truth about God’s steadfast love for each person. Jesus calls this Spirit the “Spirit of truth,” saying though the world does not know the Spirit, “*you know him because he abides with you.*” This message is dynamite in a world of naysayers who continue to usurp and twist God’s truth – denying the truth of God’s love for all people.

Speaking to the naysayers on Pentecost Peter quoted the prophet Joel, saying, “*God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men dream dreams.*” Prophecy, visions, and dreams are the forward-looking voice of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gathers the church to prophecy, envision, and dream, not through hatred, exclusion, and war, but through care for the poor and hungry, the meek and the stranger. The church is to be a voice for peace among the nations. I have been around churches long enough to know that, like the first Pentecost, naysayers are always mixed with visionaries. Are you a visionary or are you a naysayer?

The Spirit of truth gathers us as a church to prophecy, envision, and dream of ministries that love and lift others. In a dehumanizing world, it is the Spirit who re-humanizes us to live for others. We are called to be visionary and prophetic voices of God’s love.

*What does this mean?* Dream dreams and envision a world shaped by God’s love for all people. Be a prophetic voice in word and deed. In all things, give thanks because Spirit abides in you! Amen.